

US Embassy Security Message: Updated Security Info on Avoiding Snatch Theft

U.S. Citizen Security Message
US Embassy, Kuala Lumpur
March 3, 2014

Snatch theft and pickpocketing are the most commonly reported crimes in Malaysia and all of us are at risk. Thieves on motorcycles or leaning out of car windows typically snatch handbags, necklaces, and mobile phones from unsuspecting pedestrians. Snatch thieves on motorcycles have been known to drive through "red" traffic signals and onto sidewalks to steal valuables. Occasionally, motorcyclists smash car windows at stoplights and snatch the handbags or purses left on the passenger's seat. Victims have been dragged to the ground, severely injured and even killed during some of these incidents. The thieves have also been known to work in teams and distract victims while their partner(s) escape with their valuables.

Pickpocketing incidents commonly occur in crowded, urban environments such as shopping malls, market places, bars and clubs. Thieves have been known to take valuable from handbags, backpacks, and pockets in clothing, while the unsuspecting victim is distracted, often by their accomplices.

We can all take steps to avoid becoming the victim of a snatch theft or pickpocketing:

- Be alert and aware of the surroundings. Walk against traffic, on the inside of the sidewalk, with handbags kept away from the street side of the curb. Keep a close eye on any moving vehicles, particularly motorcycles with pillion riders. Be cautious at busy intersections and when crossing streets.
- Be cognizant of how you carry a handbag, backpack or parcel. Holding it in your hand beside you, or casually slung over your shoulder or behind you, makes you an easier target. Handbags should be held close to your body in front of you, and backpacks should be slung over both shoulders on your back. Be sure to fasten any closures on the bag.
- If possible, walk with a group of people and avoid poorly lit streets, shortcuts, and narrow alleys.
- Keep a low profile and avoid public displays of wealth. Do not carry large sums of cash or wear expensive, flashy jewelry. Leave any unnecessary identification documents (e.g. passport, U.S. driver's license, credit cards) at home. (Photocopies of your passport photopage are normally sufficient if asked for identification by local police.)
- Do not place your handbag or purse on the passenger's seat while driving; place any valuables on the floor or somewhere less accessible from the windows.
- Do not leave handbags or mobile phones on top of the table at cafes, restaurants, or bars.

- Do not leave your belongings unattended, even for a moment.
- Do not place valuables (e.g. money, mobile phones, etc.) in locations on your person or in your bag which are easily accessible by thieves.
- Opportunistic criminals will usually search for easy targets. Maintain situational awareness and try to make yourself a difficult target.

If you are the victim of a snatch theft, you should release your valuables immediately, as snatch thieves have resorted to violence if resisted or confronted. Try to get the vehicle license plate number and a good description of the thief. Please notify the police immediately.

The U.S. Embassy is not aware of specific threats to U.S. citizens in Malaysia at this time.

We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in Malaysia enroll in the Department of State's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](http://www.travel.state.gov/) (STEP) at <http://www.travel.state.gov/>. STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the embassy or nearest consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you don't have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Regularly monitor the [Department's website](#), where you can find current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution. Read the [Country Specific Information for Malaysia](#). For additional information, refer to "A Safe Trip Abroad."

Contact the embassy or consulate for up-to-date information on travel restrictions. You can also call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and download our free [Smart Traveler iPhone App](#) to have travel information at your fingertips.

The U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur is located at 376 Jalan Tun Razak 50400, Kuala Lumpur and is open 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. If you are a U.S. citizen and have any questions or concerns, please call the U.S. Embassy at (03) 2168-5000 or visit the U.S. Citizens Service website at <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov/>. We will post the most updated information on the website.